

## THE ROAD TO PROMISCUITY\*

BY

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Promiscuity is undoubtedly widespread in England since the narrow code of Victorian morality by which "sex" and "sin" were synonymous was replaced by the popular press's evangelization of psychiatry for the masses—the cult of the libido and the decline of self-control as a virtue. Youth has been freed from the fear of the devil. The second fear, that of conception out of wedlock, has been greatly reduced by improved and more widely-known methods of contraception, and by the lifting of social and economic sanctions which formerly operated against the unmarried mother and her child. This freedom from fear is accompanied by ignorance. There is no national policy of education in social obligations or social hygiene. Sex education in schools is neither compulsory nor standardized; where it is given it may be inadequate or too late. In one class of 14-year-old boys and girls in a Secondary Modern School serving a rural area, no less than 12 per cent. of the boys and 25 per cent. of the girls had already had sexual relations with more than one person before any scheduled sex instruction was given. The girls believed that males had no control over sexual impulses and were in danger of permanent physical impairment unless the girls submitted to their desires.

The present economic structure of England involves high-pressure salesmanship emphasizing material well-being. Hire purchase offers immediate luxury without the self-denial of saving. The physically mature girl sees no reason to refrain from sexual satisfaction or to await a more mature judgment. The State provides for all; free medical attention, free education, school meals, and children's allowances have weakened the sense of parental responsibility. The clamour for the rights of

men drowns any whisper of accompanying duties. To the unintelligent who do not look beyond material comfort, the only creed is freedom to satisfy the senses, to live in and for the moment. To the girl seeking sensual pleasure and freedom from responsibility, and above all fleeing from the boredom of a highly mechanized and standardized civilization, promiscuity is an easy answer.

It is not the present purpose to discuss the casual promiscuity of the countless young people who enjoy sexual relations with acquaintances at parties, dances, or on holiday, regarding this as a purely incidental factor in the general enjoyment of life. The group under consideration consists of 100 girls who, whilst under the age of 20, became habitually promiscuous and for whom promiscuity was a way of life. Frequently they are difficult to distinguish from the prostitute—the "female who, for reward, offers her body commonly for acts of sexual connexion or for acts of lewdness". The habitually promiscuous girl accepts a reward, in cash or kind, but in her own mind she is sharply distinguished from the prostitute whose relationship with her client is purely businesslike. The promiscuous girl expects an emotional involvement and is more selective—she does not cry her wares in the streets.

90 per cent. of these girls are associating with the floating population of unattached males normally to be found in London, from the Allied Forces of wartime to the most recent West Indian immigrants. These men are, by virtue of their circumstances, also promiscuous; but, whilst avoiding the permanent responsibility of matrimony, many seek a warmer and more lasting relationship than that offered by the prostitute. They constitute an attractive target for the dissatisfied girl in search of demonstrative affection and drawn by the glamour of men of different nationality.

Economic security no longer appears a primary factor of promiscuity. 86 per cent. of the girls come

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from financially secure families. They are of the working class but the houses are well supplied with material comforts and the children are well clothed and have ample money. The child's every material demand is met. One 15-year-old girl showed the effect of this bluntly; when asked why she was promiscuous, she replied. "It's my parents' fault. They've always given me everything I wanted. Now I want men and I will have them". Prosperity in the home has introduced a new factor which is a source of apprehension to teachers, probation officers, and police. The mother is now absent at work. From the age of 5, many children are left to cope with the difficulties of school and leisure on their own initiative. The material benefits which accrue from the working mother are callously accepted as a simple due, while the jealous child regards mother's preoccupation outside the family as lack of interest and lack of affection. Feeling unwanted at home, the boy turns to street corner gangs to prove his importance in the world. The girl satisfies her craving for affection more directly by seeking demonstrative love in sex. The boys of her environment have no interest in her; they may grant her a few experiments from curiosity but the majority return swiftly to the warmth and security of the boys' gang. The girl is forced further afield. Pleasure is her sole concern in life. Her material wants are normally supplied by her parents. Her boy friends supply entertainment at cinemas and dances. There is no incentive for her to work. She is lazy, impatient of restraint and boredom, and has no interest in anything. Only 10 per cent. of habitually promiscuous girls had held any regular work between the ages of 15 and 20.

The influence of home conditions appears to be borne out by the present group. Only 36 per cent. came from a "normal" home and were brought up by their natural parents in marriage. In half of these homes the mother went out to work, and the rest included a mentally subnormal father and families of petty criminals. There were no less than twenty obviously differing sets of parental circumstance and no attempt at general classification is possible. The fact that, at the age of 16 or 17, 80 per cent. of the girls completely cut themselves off from their home is indicative of deficiency in that home, as the girls are pathetically eager for affection and sympathy.

The two youngest girls appear to have been motivated almost entirely by home circumstances.

In one case, the father left the home when the girl was 12, as he had discovered the mother to be promiscuous. The mother then began to entertain males openly, and when three coloured American airmen were invited, the mother and a woman

friend had intercourse with two of them, whilst the third had intercourse with the child. On the following morning she had intercourse with him on four occasions, and within 2 weeks had further connexions with him and five other men. She was habitually promiscuous at the age of 13, and shortly afterwards became a prostitute.

The second girl, aged 13 years, lived alone with a widowed father who expected her to replace his wife, not only as housekeeper but as companion. He frequently committed incest with her. The girl did not regard this as a sign of affection and was afraid of her father. She did, however, appear to tolerate the situation until his insistence of her performance of domestic duties made her repeatedly late for school. To avoid reprimand, she began to play truant; she was then afraid to go home, and was often found in parks or hotels having sexual connexions with chance acquaintances. These sexual acts she accepted as affection. When removed from father's influence she responded well. Her intelligence was above average.

The habitually promiscuous girl is not distinguished by intelligence. Only 2 per cent. had passed the eleven-plus examination. The remainder included an illiterate, a certified mental defective, and one known to have an I.Q. of 71. An additional 15 per cent. had either received psychiatric treatment or had been in mental hospitals. Only 4 per cent. had received any kind of occupational training, the remainder were drawn from unskilled occupations, domestic and factory work, or had persistently refused to work. These girls are lazy in their personal habits. The majority stay in bed till late afternoon, even when they are living at home. They do not trouble to keep their bodies or clothes clean, as that is considered work. They rebel against any authority. In a discussion with a small group, one 17-year-old girl explained. "I left home at 15 because I wasn't going to have anyone tell me what to do. I lived with different men for a time, and then one of them made me work for him (as a prostitute). It was alright, but I realized that I wasn't free—he told me where to work, watched me work, took my money, and even chose my clothes. I thought I would have more freedom as a shop assistant. Then the police got him, and now I have four Americans. They share the cost of my flat and visit me when they get leave. When they aren't around, I can have other boy friends. It suits me—I'm free you see".

The other girls agreed with this summing up; 35 per cent. expressed their conscious aim as freedom and 55 per cent. stated that their aim was marriage (or in one case, bigamy, as she couldn't

choose which boy to take). By marriage they do not mean that they are ready to take on responsibility for a home and a family. Their conception of marriage is that of a romantic film—devoted and uncritical affection, physical passion, and complete freedom, a parental substitute with glamour added. The majority have never read anything but cheap magazines or American comics purveying sex and violence. The only music they hear is the popular song with its essentially erotic rhythm and content. These they hear continuously in their homes and at their places of rendezvous. 50 per cent. see no films other than sex films, horror films, and Elvis Presley. 75 per cent. frequent night clubs where they make their contacts. Several casually promiscuous girls had left home to seek the glamour of London and life as it is seen on the films. They found that the pay for unskilled work did not meet the high cost of living, and turned to employment in cheap clubs for excitement, glamour, and more money. The atmosphere of the clubs encouraged them to turn to alcohol for relief in depression with a weakening of resistance to immorality. 66 per cent. of the habitually promiscuous admitted to drinking heavily and two claimed to be alcoholics. 8 per cent. are known to smoke marijuana and the total of drug-takers is certainly higher than this.

A recent survey on social pathology concluded that criminals and social misfits defy strict classification. The promiscuous girl is a social misfit, in rebellion against the discipline of civilization or unfit to conform to the community's demands. An attempt to generalize about the road to promiscuity leads to no safe, broad conclusion. The promiscuous spring from every class of society and every type of

home. Lack of intelligent and affectionate approach by the parents is a pre-disposing factor. Society in general, by refraining from moral sanctions, has smoothed the path, which is made more attractive and brought forcibly and persistently to notice by business interests. Films, the press, dress, and cosmetic firms all concentrate on the importance of sexual attraction. But for every girl impelled to promiscuity by these external factors, a girl can be found in precisely similar circumstances who has resisted them, the individual character and psychological make up being the final determining factor. Each girl travels her personal byway to promiscuity.

### Le chemin de la promiscuité

#### Résumé

La fille promiscue est un laissé-pour-compte social, en rébellion contre la discipline de la civilisation ou incapable de se conformer aux exigences de la communauté. Une tentative de généralisation au sujet des chemins de la promiscuité ne mène à aucune conclusion large et certaine. Les promiscues viennent de toutes les classes de la société et de toutes sortes de familles. Le manque d'une approche affectueuse et intelligente par les parents est un facteur prédisposant. La société en général, en ne prenant pas de sanctions morales, a aplani le chemin, rendu plus séduisant et attirant de force et sans cesse les intérêts financiers. Cinéma, presse, maisons de couture et de cosmétiques font tous ressortir l'importance de l'attraction sexuelle. Mais pour chaque fille poussée à la promiscuité par ces facteurs externes, on en peut trouver une qui, dans des circonstances exactement semblables, leur a résisté, le caractère individuel et la disposition psychologique étant le facteur déterminant final. Chaque fille a son propre sentier menant à la promiscuité.